

**Recommendations for Discussion**  
**Marine Fisheries**

**I. Groundfish Regulations**

The current crisis in groundfish management is being exacerbated by Amendment 13 to the federal Groundfish Management Plan. Adoption of any of the four Amendment 13 options currently under consideration would irreparably harm the fishing industry and the State of Maine. Under the current options scheduled for implementation in April of 2004, there is a strong likelihood that some boats would move to ports closer to open fishing grounds, some boats would leave the fishery altogether and shore side businesses such as the Portland Fish Exchange and Vessel Services may be forced to close. Maine could lose most or all of its \$100m groundfish industry after Amendment 13 is fully implemented.

This level of economic damage for marginal biological gain is a result of the harsh requirements of the Sustainable Fisheries Act. While our best short term strategy is to move forward with Amendment 13 and the Council process, we ask for the Governor's support with the goal of working with our Congressional Delegation and other New England Governors to restore a balance between conservation and resource use in the Sustainable Fisheries Act.

**II. Groundfish Task Force**

State and regional fisheries management policies have impacted the fishing industry on a continuing basis. The Governor has created a Task Force of industry and public members to identify, develop and recommend actions to support the industry to the Governor. We recommend the Governor support the Task Force as it addresses specific competitive advantages and disadvantages and creates a strategy that will ensure that Maine has a healthy, sustainable and profitable groundfishery, both commercial and recreational, in the long term.

Increasing relocation of Maine fishing vessels to out of state ports is one of the unintended consequences of federal groundfish management. Maine's groundfish fleet faces a number of competitive disadvantages when compared to the fleet from other New England states. While there is no consensus on how or whether to address these issues specifically, we thought a the list of competitive disadvantages developed by industry would be helpful here to illustrate the point:

1. Distance to open fishing grounds and steaming time
2. Health care benefits
3. Lobster Landings on groundfish vessels
4. Unemployment compensation for crew
5. Sales tax on diesel fuel used by fishing vessels

We also recommend that the Groundfish Task Force explore creating an industry supported dedicated fund based on a landings fee. This fund could support scientific research on groundfish species habitat, and innovative gear technology to reduce bycatch and minimize environmental impacts. These funds could be used to initiate marketing and public education programs, as well. For example, a fee of \$.01 per pound would raise \$225k per year for these purposes.

### **III. Consensus Building**

Maine fishermen tend to see themselves as members of separate sectors—lobster fishermen, groundfishermen, clammers, wormers, urchin divers, oyster growers, salmon growers, recreational fishermen and so forth. However, many issues affect multiple sectors, making it necessary to build consensus and agreement across sectors to resolve many key issues.

We know the governor supports collaboration, and ask him to emphasize and urge collaboration among those with diverse interests in Maine fisheries and aquaculture. The Governor could do this by addressing the Groundfish and Aquaculture Task Forces and urge them to consider the views of multiple resource users as they move forward in their work.

We also recommend that the governor direct the Department of Marine Resources to undertake a long term planning process, including a review of agency funding, with an eye towards better positioning DMR for the future. The Department should be directed to develop a draft proposal for public review at the 2004 Fishermen's Forum with any final recommendations due by the end of 2004.

### **IV. Working Waterfront & Coastal Access**

A robust real estate market for coastal property has increased development of private residences along the coast of Maine, significantly reducing water access for Maine commercial and recreational fishermen along the entire coast. We recommend that the Governor sponsor legislation to provide waterfront owners the tools they need to keep Maine coastal waters accessible to both commercial and recreational fishermen, as well as the general public.

One specific initiative is proposed for the next legislative session. This bill will add “fisheries” to the list of purposes for which a conservation easement can be established.

Work is continuing on two other initiatives that would support the working waterfront: current use taxation and a circuit breaker program specifically targeted to waterfront land owners. Both of these issues are in the discussion stage at this time.

In addition, we recommend that:

- The Governor continue his support for additional bond funding of the Small Harbor Improvement Program. The current bond issue includes funding of \$650,000, just ½ the amount needed to maintain public waterfront facilities.
- The Governor support fine-tuning LMF and FAME programs where appropriate to support the working waterfront
- The Governor support state acquisition of additional public water access sites along the coast

## **V. Science**

Maine has the potential to be an international hub for cold water marine research and a leader in the Northeast region in fisheries science. We recommend the Governor take steps to support this vision. State, university and privately funded scientists should be urged to develop research projects that increase the knowledge of species and ecosystems which are subject to management. As part of this effort, the State will develop closer ties with the research programs currently focused on the fisheries management process, including those conducted by NMFS.

Maine has an opportunity to be a catalyst and a leader in the region for improved fisheries science. The “best available science” (on which management decisions are based) must be improved in all areas, including data collection, theory, analysis and interpretation. The State of Maine stands to gain enormously from improved understanding of the stocks we manage. A better understanding of the habitat and ecosystem that supports commercial and recreational fishing in the Gulf of Maine will lead to sustainable management of Maine’s \$1b seafood industry.

In 2002, lobster landings alone exceeded \$200 million in value. Over 6000 licensed lobster fishermen and their families and over 500 wholesale and retail seafood businesses and their employees depend on this resource. While business has been good for Maine lobster fishermen, Maine’s lobster scientists don’t fully understand why the resource has been harvested at record high levels for over ten years or the mechanisms that affect recruitment and survival. Neither do they

understand the reason why the lobster resource in southern New England has succumbed to lobster shell disease, or whether that disease is a threat to Maine's lobster resource. With so many depending on the resource, more robust ongoing stock assessment science is needed.

We recommend that the Department undertake a priority setting process as part of its long term planning requested above and that it include discussion of additional funding for Marine Science in collaboration with other public and private research institutions and the public. Any recommendations for additional funding should include specific proposals to achieve the new goals.

## **VI. Recreational Fishing License**

In each of the last several years, Maine has hosted over 300,000 recreational salt-water fishermen. Recreational salt-water fishing attracts people from both in and out of state and contributes significantly to Maine's coastal economy. However, the increased numbers of fishermen have strained some public boat launch sites to the limit, and have added to the workload for marine patrol officers who are also busy enforcing commercial fishing regulations year-round. In addition, recreational fishing (for some species) is a major component of fish mortality and must be factored in to management measures to assure sustainable fisheries.

According to many in the recreational fishing sector, the time is right to propose a recreational fishing license. Those that support this new license insist that the lion's share of revenues generated be used for purposes beneficial to recreational fishing including expanded public boat access, marine patrol and stock assessment of recreational species.

We recommend that the public discussion of this issue be broadened through the Blaine House Conference and be included in any long-term planning effort that DMR undertakes. If there is ample public support, the Department and the Recreational Fisheries Advisory Council may work together to come up with a specific proposal that includes recommendations for a fee schedule, how it would be administered and how the funds should be allocated.